COLLECTIONS DIFFER, BIRSKY AND ZAPP AGREE

The Collecting of Art Works Is a Bigger Risk than Buying Up Railways, Zapp Figures.

By Montague Glass.
Illustrations by Briggs.

"I SEEN Max Maikafer in the subway this morning," said Louis Birsky, the real estater, to Barnett Zapp, the waist manufacturer, as they met for luncheon at the corner table in Wasserbauer's. "He tells me he is going to make from his boy a painter."

"Some people don't give a damn what becomes from their children," Zapp commented.

"Is it such a capora for a boy to be a painter?" Birsky asked.

"Seemingly Max Maikafer don't think so," Zapp replied. "Maybe he would enjoy it to see his son break his neck from a ladder, Birsky."

"What are you talking—nonsense? Break his neck from a ladder!" Birsky exclaimed.

"A scaffold is just as dangerous," Zapp went on. "Yesterday I am seeing a couple fellows painting from the side of a building ten stories high, and even though one of them was an Italiener, I got so dizzy watching 'em that before I could eat my lunch at all it cost me 10 cents for some mathematic spirits of ammonia. If I would get to earn my living as a painter I would a whole lot sooner be an aviator, because while the funeral expenses is the same as for a painter, an aviator don't linger long enough to run up a doctor's bill on his widow."

"You got the wrong idea, Zapp," Birsky said. "Maikafer's boy would not be a house painter, but a picture painter."

"A picture painter!" Zapp cried. "And I thought Max Maikafer was a business man. Why don't he learn the boy a trade where he could make real big money, like a buttonhole maker or a poet?"

"That only goes to show what you know from poets," Birsky replied. "Jake Margonin, from the Fashion Store, Indianapolis, told me that right now there is a feller by the name Riley which from only being a poet is now owning most of the gilt-edged real estate in the city of Indianapolis."

"Sure I know," Zapp declared. "But this here Riley was an old-established poet when Hart, Schaffner & Marx and Kuh, Nathan & Fisher was new beginners already. Then, again, there is a bigger opening for a poet than there is for a picture painter. Take the canned soup business, the breakfast food business and even some railroad companies—all them concerns has got working for them poets which they already pay them a good yearly salary, whereas a picture painter must got to work piecework, and what for a wages could a pieceworker on pictures make, when with my own eyes I see it a bill from a wholesaler in Weltfisch's art store, which Weltfisch buys, 16-12 doz. assorted oil paintings in small sizes for $38.75 a dozen, including shadow boxes and frames, terms ten off sixty days, ninety days net? Tell me about picture painters!"

"A picture painter!" Zapp cried. "And I thought Max Maikafer was a business man."

"Say, there is a popular price line of pictures, and then again there is high grade pictures," Birsky said.

"Even so," Zapp rejoined. "You must admit that a concern like B. Altman & Co. carries a high grade line of goods, and when B. Altman died the stock was good, up-to-the-minute stuff in every department except the picture department, and when it come to the pictures they closed 'em out to the Metropolitan Museum of Art for practically nothing."

Birsky shrugged his shoulders.

"Say, what is the use arguing with an ignerammus like you, Zapp?" he said. "Don't you know that them pictures which B. Altman left to the Metropolitan Museum wasn't taken out of stock at all? They were private pictures which he collected."

"So he collected them?" Zapp commented. "Well, that's the way it is with them rich fellows. A big concern like B. Altman gets the credit for giving them pictures to the Metropolitan Museum, y'understand, whereas the people he collected them from, nobody never hears about at all. It's the same way with them charitable reshoyim which is running all them orphan asylums and homes. They bother the life out of you you should give 'em for ten or fifteen dollars to their asylums, and when you come to look it up in the annual report so that you can prove to a customer that you already paid out more than you can afford to charity, y'understand, all you see is: 'Collected from Felix Geigermann, $102.50,' and the customer sticks you another $10 for a free soup society before he would buy from you another dollar's worth of goods."

"So that's the idea you got when I tell you that B. Altman collected the pictures and gave 'em to the Metropolitan Museum?" Birsky exclaimed. "Do you think the people which B. Altman collected them pictures from gave them to him for nothing?"

"Why not?" Zapp said. "Last week, Birsky, your wife comes round to my wife while I am downtown and says she is collecting for an immigrants' home old clothing, y'understand, and my wife gives away on me two suits and an overcoat which I wouldn't be ashamed to wear getting an accommodation at a bank, so bekovat they looked."

"There's collecting and collecting," Birsky explained. "When I say B. Altman collected pictures, I mean he bought them and paid his good money for them."

"And the people which he collects from makes a profit on the transaction?" Zapp asked.

"Makes a profit!" Birsky said. "I should say they do."

"Then that is the first time that I hear such a thing," Zapp cried. "Because when some one tells me down at the store that there is a collector outside wants to see me, it don't make no difference if the collector is collecting for a bank, a hospital, the cloth sponger, a home or the landlord. I give my bookkeeper instructions she should say I just went over to Newark."

"Well, pictures is different," Birsky continued. "A feller which collects pictures like B. Altman sometimes pays enormous prices. Take, for instance, Mr. Widener Selig, the Philadelphia millionaire, and he is paying for a picture of a mill one half million dollars."

"What's the difference what kind of a mill?" Birsky said. "I believe it was a flour mill."

"A flour mill he pays half a million for its picture!" Zapp said. "Why, for a quarter of the money plenty people would of been glad to sell him a rolling mill, and throw in a dozen pictures of it free."

"And yet you say Max Maikafer should make from his boy a buttonhole maker." Birsky continued. "Take that picture painter which turned out the mill, y'understand, and if he gets only one order when he's a new beginner, understand me, business could be bad with him for the rest of his life."

"You may be right, Birsky," Zapp said, "but I don't believe a picture painter gets anywheres near the retail price of his goods, because the profit to the retailer must go to be enormous, otherwise he couldn't live at all. A retailer which handles them mill pictures runs an awful risk, Birsky. It's the same like he would be carrying a line of steam yachts. If he's only got two on hand, he's overstocked bad already."

"Sure, I know," Birsky said, "but such a retailer also stocks a line of medium priced pictures, too. For every mill picture he sells I bet yer he gets rid of a dozen Horse Shows oder Angeluses."

"Give my bookkeeper instructions she should say I just went to Newark."

They Find a Good Opening for Poets in Canned Goods and Breakfast Cereal Business.

"Of course, if the feller carries Angeluses as a side line, that's something else again, Birsky," Zapp said. "There's big money in player pianos, Birsky, because while in former times people wouldn't take a piano as a gift on account of giving their children music lessons to get the use out of it nowadays they could pay a large price for a player piano and send their girls to business college, and still save money on it. Consequently the demand for player pianos is enormous, particularly as here just lately they've got 'em working by electricity, which could run for 10 cents the kilowatt hour some of the heaviest things that Paderewski gets off at five thousand dollars a concert."

Birsky shrugged his shoulders again.

"What you understand from art, Zapp!" he exclaimed. "A Schwarzer from the Cannibal Islands which don't even wear athletic underwear knows more about fur overcoats than you do of pictures, Zapp."

"Listen, Birsky," Zapp retorted. "If them millionaires which is buying these here high priced pictures knows as much about their art investments as the public does about fur overcoats, you could take it from me, Birsky, when the millionaire's heirs comes to settle up the estate, Birsky, they'll find that instead of a five hundred thousand dollar mill the old man got stuck with a hundred dollar sweat shop. When you come to compare pictures with fur overcoats, Birsky, you never spoke a truer word in your life, because while it's an old saying and a true one that a cat comes to life nine times, Birsky, nobody but a fur overcoat manufacturer knows whether the cat is going to come to life as Persian lamb, Siberian mink, Hudson Bay seal, beaver, broad tail, nutria, ermine, skunk or sable. So if I would be a millionaire, Birsky, instead of oil painted pictures I would go to work and collect railroads and electric light plants and traction companies, because while it's true that no millionaire ever got indicted on account of

"My wife gives away on me two suits and an overcoat."

buying up a lot of competing oil paintings or making agreements with the owners of competing oil paintings to keep up the price and limit the output at the same time, Birsky, on a $500,000 oil painting no millionaire could float a $1,000,000 issue of first refunding 5 per cent gold bonds of 1985, underlying $1,000,000 of first mortgage 4 per cent bonds maturing in 1976, which is a first mortgage only on the back door subject to an issue of $8,500,000 genwine, all wool, first mortgage 3½ per cent bonds maturing January 1, 1916. Such things you could only do with a railroad, and believe me, Birsky, if you got indictments hanging over your head for the rest of your lifetime, there's more money in collecting railroads than in collecting oil painted pictures, and don't you forget it."

How American Women Can Help Restore France

Their French Sisters Need Aid to Maintain Hold On Opportunities Lost by Germany.

DOMESTIC reconstruction, even with peace a remote and wholly debatable possibility, has become one of the active ambitions of France; and in this reconstruction it is developing that American women are going to play a part—perhaps a very potent part.

The situation in France, it seems, is to-day just this: The men are engaged in carrying on the war; the women are engaged in carrying on the commerce. Both have responded to the demands of the changed order. The France of to-morrow promises to be a France in which men and women will stand shoulder to shoulder. There seems little evidence that they will not maintain this larger activity permanently.

This, in a general way, is what the women of France are doing. In what manner are American women coöperating, and in what manner are American women to play a part in the grand process of national re-establishment? Mrs. W. K. Vanderbilt explained to me in an interview shortly after her return to America from Europe some of the possibilities which are opening up before American women in this connection.

Probably no two American women are more influential and more deeply respected in France to-day than Mrs. Vanderbilt and Mrs. Harry Payne Whitney. Both have spent much time there, and both enjoy an exclusive entrée which permits their closely affiliating themselves with French life as it really is, and not as it merely appears to those who observe it from a superficial and entirely foreign point of view. Mrs. Vanderbilt explained to me very carefully that she was only one of many who were working in the interest of the French people, and that she personally much preferred not to be quoted at all. But since it is obviously not possible to go to each separate person involved, and since all groups must attain expression through a representative and spokesman, Mrs. Vanderbilt consented, were it plainly to be set down in that light, to talk of the work which she and others are carrying on.

A SERIOUS PRIVILEGE.

In the first place, it is a work of pure love, of course.

"I feel very, very deeply the tragic plight into which the war has thrown the people of France," said Mrs. Vanderbilt. "It is a profoundly serious matter. And whatever it is possible to do to re-establish the balance becomes, for one who is so deeply moved as I, a most high and serious privilege. I feel I have grown very close to the French people. I have lived with them and been received by them. They say to me: 'Ah, you are one of us.' What I can do, therefore, I am bending my fullest energies to accomplish. It is necessary to begin in a small way, but I think the future will develop these beginnings into powerful realizations which will exert an influence in the new rise of the nation."

"Will you tell me," I asked, "just what these beginnings you speak of are?"

"Yes," she replied. "In the first place, you know, all over France the women are busy manufacturing articles for export. Toys, little things, mostly, and laces. They have taken up this work with a mighty zeal, and the proportions to which it has been carried are simply wonderful. One object spurs them on: to grasp the trade necessarily relinquished by Germany. The articles have been produced in quantities, and it is in the matter of their shipment abroad that we Americans find it possible to coöperate.

"Naturally, there are limitations to even the capacity of French women. They have no sure way of deciding what will especially appeal to an American public and what will be merely a drug on the market. In Paris in the last few months I have been repeatedly requested for advice. I was in a position to judge what ought to be shipped and what ought to seek a market elsewhere. Other American women, and among them Mrs. Frederick Allen, have been active in thus assisting the women of France to dispose of their wares. We have glimpsed, in this connection, an opportunity to render service; and out of this opportunity have sprung further opportunities—which have carried our activities over to this side of the Atlantic.

"In brief, what American women can do and are doing is to coöperate in building up a new

Mrs. W. K. Vanderbilt, Friend to War Sufferers.

Opening Markets Here for War Victims' Products Is a "High Privilege" for Us.

trade between France and America. We can help in France and we can help in America. The French women produce goods for sale, and we assist in establishing a market for those goods. As I said a moment ago, this is beginning trade development in a small way. But think what great things it may lead to."

WILL NEVER BE LOST.

"You mean that it promises to lead to a whole new basis for trade between France and the United States?" I asked.

"Yes," she replied with deep enthusiasm. "I believe that what can be built up at this time will never be lost afterward. If the women of France can successfully supply markets hitherto monopolized by Germany, why should those markets revert back to the old sources of supply when the seas are once more open to navigation by German ships? I firmly believe that what is now being accomplished is something which will have a permanent effect. It is a patriotic work of the highest order the women of France are doing. And it is a work which finely exemplifies the character of those women, just such a work as those who know them well would expect to find them consecrating their lives to in a crisis like this."

War, both in the abstract and concrete, must produce a decided psychological effect upon the people of nations involved in it. History cannot present an instance where this rule has not obtained. War's impress upon the men who actually wage it is perhaps most striking, but its impress upon the women who remain at home is not less real. In France it has impelled the women to an almost unexampled pitch of self-sacrifice and stoic heroism.

"The butterfly notion of French women," declared Mrs. Vanderbilt—"a notion which is perhaps generally held in this country—utterly and flatly fails to fit in any particular. The French women are certainly not that—not mere silly, gay, trivial, flitting little butterflies—but women of sound, solid calibre and magnificent mentality. Their influence in France is supreme. In the home their sway is never questioned. The children look to them entirely and in everything. The mother holds jurisdiction over all matters of conduct and education. The voice of the father is not heard. Thus it is that French mothers are so highly venerated."

"And it is to be presumed," I suggested, "that those qualities which go to make the French mother so admirable a mother tend also to the patriotic expression which is to be observed among the women at this time when their country needs the best and all that can be offered?"

"Yes," Mrs. Vanderbilt agreed, "the fine response of the women of France is a direct expression of those qualities which compose the fibre of their beings. It is marvellous to consider the scope and the splendid fearlessness of that response. The war has brought about a complete social reorganization. The men are engaged on the battlefield. At home, in consequence of this, the women are in a majority. Life must go on, as nearly as possible, in a normal fashion. The rhythm of the mechanism has hardly been broken. The women have quietly stepped into the places left vacant by the men, and have taken up the occupations where they were perforce abandoned.

"Women to-day are serving in almost every conceivable capacity. They are doing work of all sorts hitherto carried on by men—and they are doing it quite as well as it ever was done. In many cases they are doing it better than it has ever been done. For this reason I believe that the women will not retire from the enlarged activity which the war made urgent, even when necessity shall cease to operate. I

Continued on page six.